



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Norway

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
February 28, 2005

Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with King Harald V as the head of state. It is governed by a prime minister, cabinet, and a 165-seat Storting (Parliament) that is elected every 4 years and cannot be dissolved. Free and fair elections to the modified unicameral Storting were held in September 2001. The judiciary is independent.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country, which is an advanced industrial state with a mixed economy combining private and public ownership that provides a high standard of living for residents, had a population of approximately 4.5 million. The key industries were oil and gas, metals, engineering, shipbuilding, fishing, and manufacturing. The economy was characterized by low unemployment and labor shortages in many sectors.

The Government generally respected the rights of its citizens, and the law and the judiciary provided effective means of addressing individual instances of abuse.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1

Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison conditions generally met international standards, and the Government permitted visits by independent human rights observers; however, there were no such visits during the year.

Men and women were held separately. Juveniles were not held separately from adults; however, it was extremely rare for juveniles to be held in prison, and social welfare authorities generally cared for them. Pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security; however, in times of crisis, such as internal disorder or natural catastrophe, the police may call on the armed forces for assistance. In such circumstances, the armed forces are under police authority.

The law requires warrants for arrests, and police arrested a person based on a warrant authorized by a prosecutor. Police must file charges within 4 hours against detained persons. An arrested suspect must be arraigned within 24 hours, at which time the arraigning judge determines whether the accused should be held in custody or released pending trial. Arrested persons were allowed prompt access to a lawyer of their choosing or, if they could not afford one, to an attorney appointed by the Government.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court Appellate Court, superior courts, county courts for criminal cases, magistrate courts for civil cases, and claims courts. Special courts include the Impeachment Court (composed of parliamentarians), the labor court, trusteeship courts, fishery courts, and land ownership severance courts.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Trials are public and juries are used. Charges are stated clearly and formally, and there is a presumption of innocence. All defendants have the right to be present, to have counsel (at public expense if needed), to confront witnesses, to present evidence, and to appeal.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2

Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice and did not restrict academic freedom. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The state church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which is supported financially by the Government and to which 86 percent of the population nominally belongs. The Constitution requires that the King and at least one-half of the Cabinet belong to this church. Public debate on the relationship between church and state continued during the year. Other denominations operated freely.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

The law provides that the subject "religious knowledge and education in ethics" be taught in public schools. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. The course is mandatory, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. The Supreme Court reaffirmed the law in 2001. Schools provided a standard form to parents to request exemptions for their children from parts of the class, and some students reportedly availed themselves of the exemption. The Norwegian Humanist Association also lodged a complaint about the law with the U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). In November, the UNHRC ruled against the law.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask applicants for employment in private or religious schools and day care centers whether they will respect and teach Christian beliefs and principles.

In 2003, the majority of the approximately 40 reported anti-Semitic incidents involved verbal harassment of primary and secondary Jewish students by non-Jewish students. A small number of incidents in 2003 involved threats against Jewish persons. However, during the year, anecdotal evidence from Jewish organizations suggests that there was a marked decrease in the level of verbal harassment. There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or vandalism.

The Government is vigilant in fighting anti-Semitism and promoting religious tolerance. In April, Prime Minister Bondevik met with two Jewish children who had been harassed because of their religion and, at the conclusion of the meeting, issued a strong statement condemning anti-Semitism and calling on the public to fight anti-Semitism more actively.

In the past, Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they are concentrated. Since 1975, the town council in Drammen had regularly turned down applications to build a mosque. However, during the year, the Muslim community in Drammen received permission to build a mosque. No other problems with permission to construct mosques have been reported.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution. The Government granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. The Government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol. During the year, the Government granted refugee status to approximately 1,000 claimants for their physical protection and to an additional 620 persons for humanitarian reasons.

The Government required asylum seekers to make their claims in "safe countries" through which they traveled. During the year, the Government implemented a "fast track" system for processing asylum claims from nationals of "safe countries" within 48 hours of application. Persons were not excluded from consideration for asylum because they were from a "safe country."

Section 3

Respect for Political Rights: Citizens' Right to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Elections to the Storting were held in September 2001.

The law provided for public access to government information, and the Government provided it in practice.

There were no restrictions in law or practice on women's participation in government and politics. There were 57 women in the 165-seat Storting; women headed 8 of the 19 government ministries.

There was only 1 minority member of the 165-seat Storting and none in the 19 member Cabinet.

Section 4

Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5

Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language, or social status, and the Government generally enforced this prohibition in practice.

Women

Societal violence against women was a problem. In 2003, there were 87 rape convictions. The police believed that increases in reported rapes and domestic abuse were due largely to greater willingness among women to report these crimes. The police investigated and prosecuted such crimes and also have instituted special programs to prevent rape and domestic violence and to counsel victims. Public and private organizations ran several shelters. Each of the country's 19 counties had a number of such shelters. In 2003, the country's shelters registered 48,619 overnight stays by 2,498 women.

Prostitution is legal, but organized prostitution or "pimping" is illegal. Foreign women comprised at least 50 percent of the country's prostitutes.

The Gender Equality Ombudsman--charged with enforcing the Gender Equality Act--processed complaints of sexual discrimination. In 2003, there were 476 complaints and 476 telephone inquiries to the ombudsman; women filed approximately 50 percent of the complaints, men filed 30 percent, organizations filed 15 percent, and the ombudsman's office directly filed 5 percent. The ombudsman was generally effective in processing and investigating complaints.

An amendment to the Working Environment Act provides that "employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other unseemly behavior." Employers that violate these provisions, including the harassment clause, are subject to fines or prison sentences of up to 2 years, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

The law protects the rights of women and provides that women and men engaged in the same activity shall have equal wages for work of equal value. According to the Gender Equality Ombudsman's office, which monitors enforcement of the law, women generally received 10 to 15 percent less pay and benefits than men for equal work.

In 2003, the Storting passed a resolution that mandates that 40 percent of publicly listed companies' directorships be held by women by 2005. Starting in 2007, the Government will penalize non-complying companies by removing them from the Oslo Stock Exchange.

Children

The Government is strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of education and medical care. The Government provides free education for children through the postsecondary level. Education is compulsory for 10 years, or through the ninth grade; most children stay in school at least until the age of 18. An independent Children's Ombudsman Office, within the Ministry of Children and Families, is responsible for the protection of children under the law.

During the year, authorities reported 1,948 child visits to abuse shelters.

Trafficking in Persons

The country was a destination for an unspecified but believed to be small number of women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, particularly from Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states.

The maximum sentence for trafficking in persons is 10 years' imprisonment. Traffickers can also be charged with violating pimping, immigration, and other laws. During the year, there were no prosecutions for such offenses; however, the Government charged a number of persons in connection with two major trafficking investigations that were ongoing at year's end. In one of these two investigations, authorities collaborated with their German counterparts, who arrested two persons in May. The Government has requested their extradition. The case was in the pretrial phase at year's end.

In 2003, the Government allocated \$15 million (NOK 100 million) over a 3-year period to prevention, prosecution, and protection programs under its National Action Plan Against Trafficking. The Ministry of Justice and Police is responsible for coordinating implementation of the action plan.

Foreign victims of trafficking have the same legal rights as other foreigners to apply for residency, asylum, welfare, social aid, and emergency health care. The Government, in cooperation with public services, a crisis center, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is responsible for assisting possible victims of trafficking. In 2003, the Government implemented a "reflection period," during which expulsion decisions concerning victims of trafficking may be suspended for 45 days to provide time for practical assistance and counseling to the individuals concerned.

Government officials provided for public awareness of trafficking by raising the issue in a number of speeches and other forums. NGOs conducted outreach programs to provide trafficking victims with information on their legal rights and available health and other services.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other state services. The law mandates access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, and the Government generally

enforced these provisions in practice.

Indigenous People

The Government has taken steps to protect the rights of the indigenous Sami by providing Sami language instruction at schools in their areas, radio and television programs broadcast or subtitled in Sami, and subsidies for newspapers and books oriented toward the Sami. A deputy minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs deals specifically with Sami issues.

In addition to participating freely in the national political process, the Sami elect their own constituent assembly, the Sameting. Under the law establishing the 39-seat body, the Sameting is a consultative group, which meets regularly to deal with "all matters, which in [its] opinion are of special importance to the Sami people." In practice, the Sameting has been most interested in protecting the group's language and culture and in influencing decisions on resources and lands where Sami are a majority. A report on the activity of the Sameting is submitted to the Storting annually, and every 4 years a report on the main principles of Sami policy is presented to the Storting.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers exercised these rights in practice. Approximately 60 percent of the workforce was unionized.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

All workers, including government employees and military personnel, have and exercised the right to organize and bargain collectively. The law provides for the right to strike, and workers exercised this right in practice; however, the Government has the right, with the approval of the Storting, to invoke compulsory arbitration under certain circumstances. During the year, the Government invoked compulsory arbitration twice, once in response to a North Sea oilrig workers strike and once in response to a transportation strike.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Section 5).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

Children 13 to 18 years of age may be employed part-time in light work that will not affect adversely their health, development, or schooling. Minimum age rules were observed in practice and enforced by the Directorate of Labor Inspections (DLI).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislated or specified minimum wage, but wages normally fall within a national scale negotiated by labor, employers, and the Government at the local and company level. During the year, wages increased by approximately 4 percent. The average daily wage provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The law limits the normal workweek to 37½ hours and provides for 25 working days of paid leave per year (31 days for those over age 60). The law mandates a 28-hour rest period on weekends and holidays.

The law provides for safe and physically acceptable working conditions for all employed persons. Specific standards are set by the DLI in consultation with nongovernmental experts. Under the law, environment committees composed of management, workers, and health personnel must be established in all enterprises with 50 or more workers, and safety delegates must be elected in all organizations. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health. The DLI effectively monitored compliance with labor legislation and standards.